

## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION REPORT

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15. SUMMARY: (C/NFD) This report forwards a trip report made by a member of the British Embassy, probably located in Bogota, but not identified by Commander CORNER. CORNER accepts information as being accurate, especially as far as military dispositions are concerned. Of interest is the reported strength of 2,000 troops in Fonseca, base of Cavalry Group (Squadron) Rondon, and 700 troops in Maicao (1122N-7215W) and 300 in Uribia (1143N-7215W). Report of establishment of an army base at Riohacha (1132N-7254W) tends to confirm previous reports of intent to use this location as aerial resupply port.

(This report has the caveat "NO FOREIGN DISSEM" due to mention of 3d country.)

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16. DISTRIBUTION BY ORIGINATOR:  
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18. ATTACHMENT DATA:  
1 Enclosure  
(C) Report on Guajira  
Peninsula

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DD FORM 1396  
1 SEP 62

REPLACES DA FORM 1048, 1 AUG 60,  
OPNAV FORM 3820 (Rev 10-61),  
AF FORM 112, JUL 61, WHICH MAY BE  
USED UNTIL 1 JAN 63.

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## A PRIVATE VISIT TO THE GUAJIRA 21-28 DECEMBER 1970

1. Description. The terrain is largely composed of low-lying arid land with a thin sprinkling of cactus, shrubs and small trees. Apart from the one paved road (Rio Hacha - Maicao), communications are confined to rough desert tracks, often rendered impassable after rain. The land is however by no means sterile, and some areas yield good crops of cotton and maize and others support remarkably healthy-looking cattle. There are only two centres of population of any size, Rio Hacha, a seedy town which is now the administrative capital of the newly-created department, and Maicao, which has in the last decade mushroomed from "pueblito" size, thanks to its life-blood, - contraband. The population is mixed. South of a line Rio Hacha-Maicao there is a strong negro admixture, and the majority of the people are mulatto or mestizo. North of the Rio Hacha-Maicao line (the area usually termed Alta Guajira) the Guajira Indian strain predominates, and there are reckoned to be some 40,000 tribal Indians there. The coastal villages however contain a considerable amount of negro blood.

2. Military presence. I spent two nights in the army barracks at Buenavista (near the village of Fonseca) in the southern part of the Guajira. This is the Colombian military headquarters for the whole area. I was told (not by the military themselves) that the garrison there had recently been bolstered up to a strength of 2,000 men and that their weaponry had been improved; that there were a further 700 men in a camp just outside Maicao; and 300 more in Uribia, the former capital of the Guajira, situated in the middle of the Alta Guajira. I also noticed a provisional army base being set up in Rio Hacha.

3. I spoke to both Colonel Suarez, the Commander of the Buenavista barracks, and his second-in-command Major Bedoya about the situation vis-à-vis Venezuela. Both seemed very much inclined to play down the seriousness of the situation, and almost totally discounted the possibility of hostilities between the two countries. Nonetheless, they said, Colombia must be seen to be in a state of preparedness. In conversation with Major Bedoya it soon became apparent that he did not really understand what the dispute between the two countries involved. He was under the impression that it was a question of Colombia's wishing to extend her territorial waters to 200 miles. On 28 December as I left the Guajira from Rio Hacha, Colonel Suarez met General Ovalle at the airport. As Commander of the Second Brigade in Barranquilla, General Ovalle has overall command in the Guajira.

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4. Alta Guajira. There are two somewhat unpredictable factors in the Alta Guajira (the area which is contiguous with the disputed continental shelf): the Indians and the contraband. Both of these could possibly be exploited by the Venezuelans à la Rupununi.

5. Although the Guajiro Indians are Guajiros first and Colombians second, they have been very much more assimilated into the life of Colombia than tribal Indians in other parts of the country eg those of the Chocó, Vaupés, Amazonas, Putumayo and Sierra de Perijá. They almost all speak at least some Spanish, and most of them participate in some way or other in Catholic Christianity (the Indian graves outside the "rancherías" are always topped by crosses). One chief I spoke to in the Alta Guajira, who was also a deputy to the Guajira assembly, energetically rejected my suggestion that it might not matter to the Indians whether they were Colombians or Venezuelans. He said that his people were Colombians and that they derived a certain satisfaction from this fact, although he went on to complain of the desperate lack of medical and educational facilities in the area. His prognostication on the dispute with Venezuela was "perro que ladra no muerde".

6. One is forever being reminded of the proximity of Venezuela. Most of the vehicles in the Alta Guajira carry Venezuelan number plates. Transistor radios seem to be tuned to Radio Maracaibo more often than not. And I was told by a Capuchin priest who had worked in the area for some fifteen years that the Indians were continuously crossing the frontier. Many of them had "cedulas" of both countries. He estimated that every month some 1,000 Indians crossed into Venezuela to work as labourers in Zulia. This is probably exaggerated, but there are certainly many Guajiros in the Maracaibo region taking advantage of the higher wages. And, while in the Alta Guajira, I was repeatedly asked whether I had been to Maracaibo, and never if I had been to Santa Marta. With this to-ing and fro-ing the Venezuelans might see good conditions for the creation of a fifth column.

7. The smuggling is a constant source of instability in the area, as was seen in mid-December, when the inhabitants of Maicao, who live almost exclusively off contraband, reacted violently to the Colombian authorities' attempt to put customs legislation into effect. For many years the two-way illicit traffic of goods between Colombia and Venezuela and between Colombia and Aruba has stood as a challenge to the Colombians' ability to police their own territory. And even now there seems to be a remarkable absence of police or military presence in the Alta Guajira. The ease with which the "contrabandistas" come and go could also be seen by the Venezuelans as an invitation to subversion.